



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One
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Ref: JS014-05
March 22, 2005

To: Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Director's Office – Reg Peterson; Legal Unit - Brandi Fisher; Parks – Walt Timmerman, Allan Kuser, Paul Valle
*Montana Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, PO Box 201202, Helena, 59620-1202
*Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
Rep Gordon Hendrick, P O Box 262, Superior, MT 59872-0262
Rep Paul Clark, 20 Fox Lane, Trout Creek, MT 59874-9510
Sen Jim Elliott, 100 Trout Creek Road, Trout Creek, MT 59874-9609
Thompson Falls Library, P O Box 99, Thompson Falls, MT 59873
Sanders County Commissioners, P O Box 519, Thompson Falls, MT 59873

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, has prepared a draft environmental assessment for the purpose of improving the facilities at the Heron boat ramp, located on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir of the lower Clark Fork River in Sanders County, Montana, so that the site can be enjoyed and easily accessed by the public for boat launching, day-use recreation, and fishing.

The draft will be out for public review through April 6, 2005. A copy of the draft is attached. Please direct your questions or comments to Regional Parks Manager Marty Watkins, (406) 751-4573 or e-mail mawatkins@state.mt.us.

Sincerely,

James Satterfield
Region One Supervisor

/ni
Enclosure

HERON BOAT RAMP

Public Draft Environmental Assessment

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action:

The proposed action is to grant Sanders County \$12,500 in funding through the Motorboat Enhancement Act to provide a boat ramp and dock at Heron.

2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:

Montana Codes Annotated 23-1-101

3. Name of Project: Heron Boat Ramp

4. Name, Address, and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency):

5. If Applicable:

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Spring 2005

Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2005

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 50%

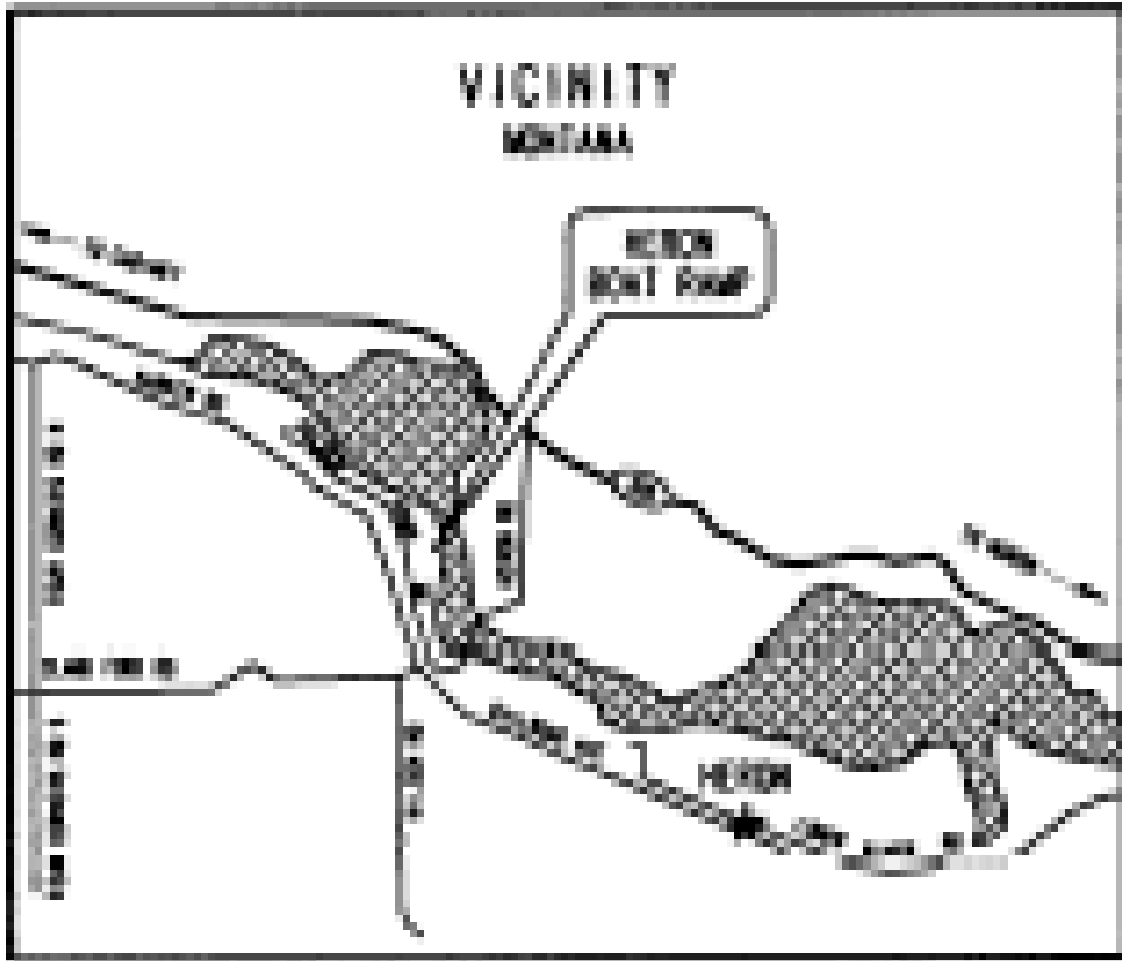
6. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range, and township):

The Heron boat ramp is located on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir of the lower Clark Fork River in Sanders County, Montana (S28, T27N, R34W).

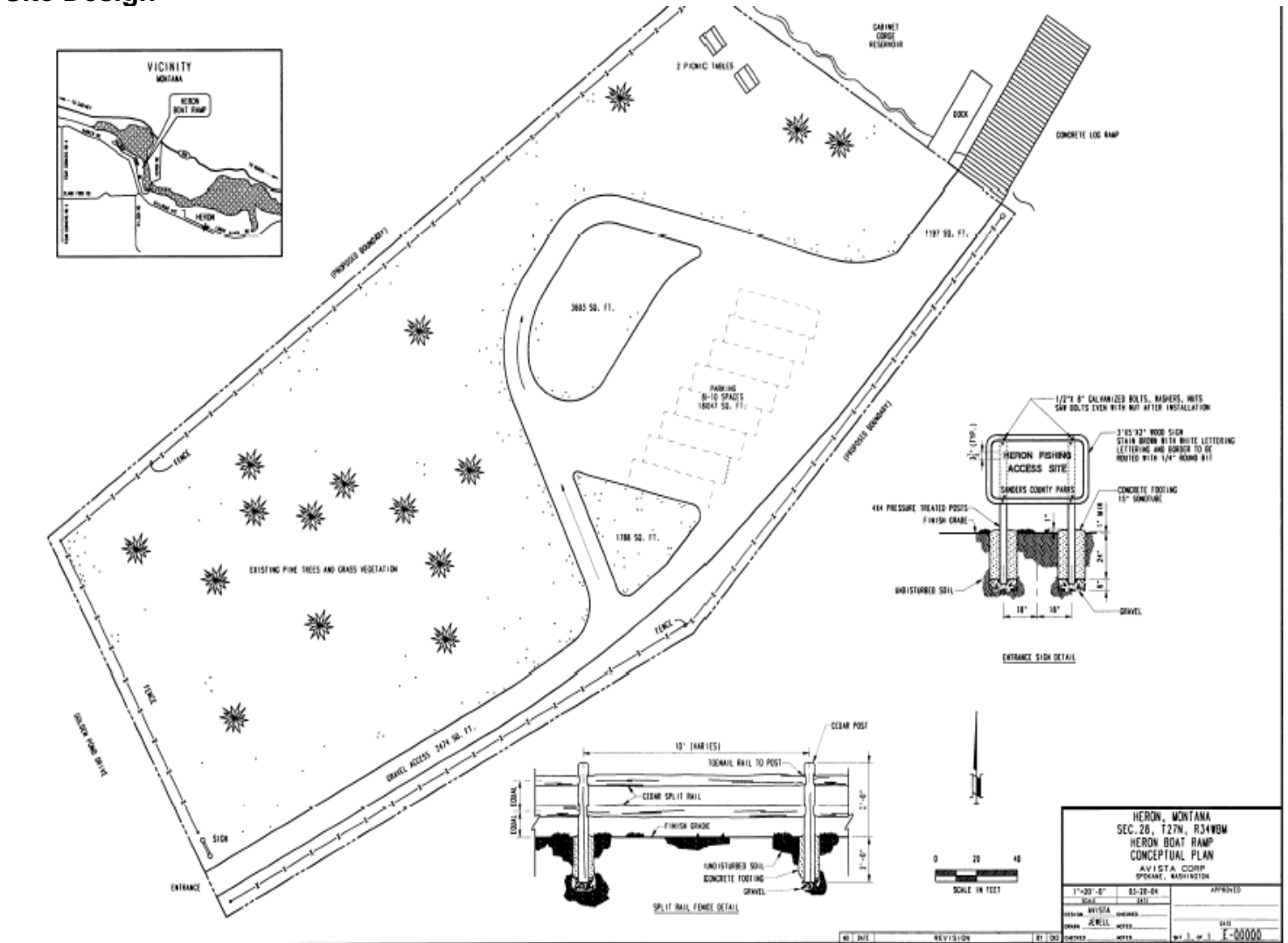
7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acre		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	_____
residential	_____		
industrial	_____	(e) Productive:	
		irrigated cropland .	_____
(b) Open	2.4	dry cropland	_____
		forestry	_____
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas ...	_____	rangeland	_____
		other	_____

8. Map/Site Plan: Attach an original 8½" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.



Site Design



9. Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action or Project, Including the Benefits and Purpose of the Proposed Action:

The goal of the project is to improve the facilities at the Heron boat ramp so that the site can be enjoyed and easily accessed by the public for boat launching, day-use recreation, and fishing on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir. To accomplish this goal, we propose to implement the following improvements:

- Replace the current ramp with a new one-lane concrete-log boat ramp .
- Provide a 6'-by-20' dock with synthetic, low-maintenance decking.
- Provide a gravel parking area adjacent to the boat ramp to accommodate up to 15 vehicles with boat trailers.
- Provide universal access between the parking area and boat launch.
- Provide a picnicking area, including universally accessible tables; provide a universally accessible hardened-surface pathway to the picnicking area.
- Provide a shoreline fishing area and a universally accessible trail that leads to the area.
- Install a rustic perimeter fence (split rail).
- Install directional signage on the main road leading to the site.
- Install educational signage at the boat launch.

Ongoing operation and maintenance of the site will be a cooperative effort between Sanders County and Avista

Corporation. As the primary landowner, Sanders County has a long-term commitment to carry out operations and maintenance of the Heron boat ramp site. As holder of a 45-year license for two dams on the lower Clark Fork, Avista has made a long-term commitment to work with the county on maintenance and operations of the site. In accordance with the cooperative agreement between the county and Avista, Avista will work with the county to install and remove the public dock each spring and fall, using Avista equipment where possible. In addition, an Avista employee will visit the site twice weekly during the recreation season (May – September). The Avista employee will inspect the site, pick up litter, and visit with users. The county will be responsible for site management, including maintaining the integrity of the parking lot. Avista employees will make periodic visits to the site during the off-season and will assist the county with management objectives as possible.

10. Listing of Any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency That Has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

Sanders County
Avista Corp.

(b) Funding:

Project Cost Information				
Category	Grant Requested	Sponsor Funds (if applicable)	Value of In-Kind Contributions (if applicable)	Total Project Cost
Design and Engineering	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>\$3,000</u> (Provided by Avista)	<u>\$3,000</u>
Labor	<u>0</u>	<u>\$250</u> (For signs; provided by Noxon School)	<u>\$5,000</u> (Provided by Sanders County)	<u>\$5,250</u>
Equipment Rental	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Construction Contracts	<u>\$7,500</u> (50% of ramp)	<u>\$7,500</u> (50% of ramp; provided by Avista)	<u>\$4,500</u> (For fencing; provided by Avista)	<u>\$19,500</u>
Materials	<u>\$5,000</u> (50% of dock and one table)	<u>\$5,000</u> (50% of dock and one table; provided by Avista)	<u>\$2,500</u> (For gravel; provided by Sanders County)	<u>\$12,500</u>
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	<u>\$12,500</u>	<u>\$12,750</u>	<u>\$15,000</u>	<u>\$40,250</u>

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks **Type of Responsibility** Funding

11. List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the proposed action, including secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical and human environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant		
>a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		Y	1b
>c. Destruction, covering, or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition, or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream, or the bed or shore of a lake?			X		Y	1c
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other (list)						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1b & c. During construction there will be an increased opportunity for runoff into the lake due to construction. Silt fence will be used to preclude this. In the long term, siltation into the lake should be reduced as the site will be stabilized and improved from its current condition.

⊗ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
 ➤ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
 ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
 ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⚙]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⚙]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⚙]	None	Minor [⚙]	Potentially Significant		
➤a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)			X			2a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X			2b
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
♦e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2a & b. During construction there will be emissions from heavy equipment, which may cause objectionable odors and dust. At the completion of the project this should be eliminated or reduced from the current situation due to the use of gravel and the improvement in the road condition.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?			X		Y	3a
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		Y	3b
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water-related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
♦♦1. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
♦m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3a & b: During construction there may be increased runoff. This will be mitigated by the use of siltation screening. After construction, the amount of runoff may be increased due to the hardening of the site; the site will be designed to divert runoff into a vegetative area where it can be cleaned before entering the lake.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⚙]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⚙]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⚙]	None	Minor [⚙]	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Y	4e
♦♦f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4e. With the soil disturbance of construction, there will be an opportunity for invasive weed species to increase. The site will be monitored for weeds and will be treated under the Avista weed management program as needed

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?		X				
♦♦h. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
♦i. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			6a
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X		Y	6b
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

6a & b: During construction it is anticipated that the use of machinery will increase noise from the site. This will end with the completion of construction. Care will be taken to do construction during daylight hours so as to not disturb adjacent neighbors.

With improvement at the site, it is anticipated that use will increase. This use will increase noise from users at the site. Severe noise is not expected, but the additional noise may be seen as being a nuisance to adjacent neighbors.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				7d
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7d. Since the site is currently used, it is not anticipated that the use of a properly designed site will crease any additional adverse effects on nearby residences.

- ⊗ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ◆ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ◆◆ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u>	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant	
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?				X		8a
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?			X			
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X			
♦d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a.)			X			
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8a. During construction there is a possibility of release of gasoline onto the site by heavy equipment. Care will be taken to keep gasoline away from the lakeshore to avoid this. Gasoline will not be available on-site so it is expected that the possibility of a spill from an individual filling their boat with a gas can will be no greater than currently exists. Runoff from the site will be channeled through vegetation to try to prevent runoff into the lake.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u>	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant	
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?			X			
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?			X			
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?			X			
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?			X			
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X			9e
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9e. With improvements to the road accessing the site, and designated parking, it is expected that the area will be less hazardous than it is currently.

- ⊗ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electrical power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources.						10e
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10f
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10e & f: Please see project narrative.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ◆ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ◆◆ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista, or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
➤c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach tourism report.)			X			11c
♦d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails, or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11c: The quality of recreational opportunity will be improved with this project.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT [⊗]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [⊗]	Comment Index
	Unknown [⊗]	None	Minor [⊗]	Potentially Significant		
➤a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure, or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
♦♦d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12a.)		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- ⊗ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole,:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources, which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard, or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
♦f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
♦♦g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.
- Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result, and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CONTINUED)

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no-action alternative) to the proposed action, whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider, and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative I: Do not construct the boat ramp facility. Boating access to the south side of Cabinet Reservoir would remain limited.

Alternative II: Develop the site as listed in the environmental assessment. The goal of the project is to improve the facilities at the Heron boat ramp so that the site can be enjoyed and easily accessed by the public for boat launching, day-use recreation, and fishing on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir. To accomplish this goal, the following improvements are proposed:

- Replace the current ramp with a new one-lane concrete-log boat ramp.
- Provide a 6'-by-20' dock with synthetic, low-maintenance decking.
- Provide a gravel parking area adjacent to the boat ramp to accommodate up to 15 vehicles with boat trailers.
- Provide universal access between the parking area and boat launch.
- Provide a picnicking area, including universally accessible tables; provide a universally accessible, hardened-surface pathway to the picnicking area.
- Provide a shoreline fishing area and a universally accessible trail that leads to the area.
- Install a rustic perimeter fence (split rail).
- Install directional signage on the main road leading to the site.
- Install educational signage at the boat launch.

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

1b and c. During construction there will be an increased opportunity for runoff into the lake due to construction. Silt fence will be used to preclude this. In the long term, siltation into the lake should be reduced as the site will be stabilized and improved from its current condition.

2a and b. During construction there will be emissions from heavy equipment, which may cause objectionable odors and dust. At the completion of the project, this should be eliminated or reduced from the current situation due to the use of gravel and the improvement in the road condition.

3a and b: During construction there may be increased runoff. This will be mitigated by the use of siltation screening. After construction, the amount of runoff may be increased due to the hardening of the site; the site will be designed to divert runoff into a vegetative area where it can be cleaned before entering the lake.

4e. With the soil disturbance of construction, there will be an opportunity for invasive weed species to increase. The site will be monitored for weeds and will be treated under the Avista weed management program as needed.

6a and b: During construction it is anticipated that the use of machinery will increase noise from the site. This will end when construction is completed. Care will be taken to do construction during daylight hours so as to not disturb adjacent neighbors.

With improvement at the site, it is anticipated that use will increase. This use will increase noise from users at the site. Severe noise is not expected, but the additional noise may be seen as being a nuisance to adjacent neighbors.

7d. Since the site is currently used, it is not anticipated that the use of a properly designed site will increase any additional adverse effects on nearby residences.

8a. During construction there is a possibility of release of gasoline onto the site by heavy equipment. Care will be taken to keep gasoline away from the lakeshore to avoid this. Gasoline will not be available on-site so it is expected that the possibility of a spill from an individual filling their boat with a gas can will be no greater than currently exists. Runoff from the site will be channeled through vegetation to try to prevent runoff into the lake.

9e. With improvements to the road accessing the site, and designated parking, it is expected that the area will be less hazardous than it is currently.

11c: The quality of recreational opportunity will be improved with this project.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

A. PROJECT AREA

The Heron boat ramp is located on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir of the lower Clark Fork River in Sanders County, Montana. Primarily used by local boaters, the reservoir provides close-to-home recreation opportunities for the residents of the lower Clark Fork River valley, including the rural towns of Heron and Noxon, Montana.

Because the lower Clark Fork boasts a significant sport fishery, fishing constitutes about 75% of the boating activity on the lower river. Fishing pressure surveys conducted by the state of Montana indicate fishing pressure on the lower Clark Fork doubled between 1989 and 1996 (from 3017 angler days per year in 1989, to 6072 angler days per year in 1996.) While surveys show that most of these anglers are from the local region, some boaters are also out-of-area and regional visitors coming to enjoy angling opportunities, including tournaments held annually by the Bass Angler Sportsman Society on Noxon Reservoir. In addition to fishing, boaters also enjoy the lower Clark Fork for water skiing, touring, tubing, and general relaxation. Peak boating use on the lower Clark Fork is from July through August.

The majority of boat facilities on the lower Clark Fork are located on Noxon Reservoir. There are two developed and well-utilized sites on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir (at Bull River and Big Eddy), which are used primarily for larger boats. The Heron boat ramp, which is an undeveloped site, provides the only boat access on the south side of the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir and is used primarily by local residents (approximately 200 people during the boating season) for launching small boats.

B. HERON BOAT RAMP: CURRENT CONDITIONS AND USE

Offering outstanding views of the Cabinet Mountains, the 2.45-acre Heron boat ramp site is currently undeveloped, except for a one-lane, dirt ramp that provides access to the river. Because the ramp surface conditions are rough and in need of repair, the launch is primarily used for very small boats. Road access into the site is rutted and in need of improvement, and there is no defined, developed parking area. There is no formal shoreline fishing access. No provisions

have been made for universal accessibility, and there is no directional or informational signage.

C. PROJECT NEEDS AND HOW THEY WILL BE ADDRESSED

Unique features: Pool levels on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir fluctuate on a daily and weekly basis. Because of these water level fluctuations, a boat launch ramp needs to be capable of accommodating a variety of pool levels from May-September. The existing boat ramp at the Heron site does not accommodate fluctuating levels. The proposal is to replace the current gravel ramp with a concrete-log ramp and extend the length of the ramp into the reservoir by approximately 10 feet, which would allow boat access at low recreation pool levels and improve access from the site at all water levels.

Meeting demand: According to estimates from the lower Clark Fork River Recreation Resource Management Plan (RRMP) prepared for Avista Corporation¹, by 2005 over 9,000 boaters will be utilizing boat launching facilities on the lower Clark Fork River. The lower river and its reservoirs are continuing to increase in popularity as recreation destination points; each year fishing tournaments attract fishermen and boaters from a wide geographic area. Additionally, Sanders County is currently experiencing an 18 percent population growth rate. It is likely that demand for improved access to the river will continue to expand, and improvements at the site will help in meeting this demand.

Access and safety for local residents: Local residents from Heron, Noxon and Clark Fork (Idaho) can access the Heron site by using a local south side road, thereby avoiding the use of Highway 200, a busy and winding thoroughfare. Improvements will encourage boaters, especially those with smaller boats, to utilize this site to safely access the lower river.

Compatible boating and recreational opportunities: Because the site is currently undeveloped, recreational opportunities are quite limited. Improvements to the site will result in increased compatible day-use motor boating and recreational opportunities on the river (i.e., fishing, water skiing, tubing, and touring) and at the site (picnicking, shoreline fishing, and relaxation).

Provisions for access for the disabled: A study of universal accessibility at existing facilities along the lower Clark Fork River² identified a multitude of barriers to accessibility at most established recreation and fishing access sites in the valley and confirmed the lack of any universal access at the Heron site. Universal accessibility is a critical issue in Sanders County where disability data (2000) shows that 22% of the county's population of 10,227 (2,253 residents) have some form of disability, 1,052 residents have a severe disability, and 185 children have a disability. Accessibility improvements at the site will benefit people with disabilities as well as families with young children and the elderly.

¹ Avista Corporation holds license to two dams on the lower Clark Fork River (at Noxon Rapids and Cabinet Gorge). The RRMP was prepared by EDAW, Inc., Seattle, Washington, December 1998.

² In 1998, Avista Corporation contracted with Alpha One, South Portland, Maine to inventory and assess existing recreational facility conditions and barriers to universal accessibility at recreation sites along the lower Clark Fork River.

Boater education: Educational needs for boaters on Cabinet Gorge Reservoir include:

(1) *Boating safety*: Because boat traffic can be busy during peak summer months, it is important to educate boaters about boating safety at the point of entry. (2) *Eurasian milfoil*: This noxious aquatic weed is spread by boats and threatens recreational uses and fish habitat on a number of waterways in the region. To prevent an infestation of milfoil in the lower Clark Fork and reservoirs, educational signs are placed at all boat launch sites. (3) *Fishing regulations*: Because a large percentage of boaters are using the reservoir for fishing, boaters need to know state regulations for harvesting fish species in the river and to prevent the accidental harvest of federally-listed bull trout.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? YES / NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:**

Based on the evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

- 2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project, if any; and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances:**

Local support for the project is demonstrated by letters, which are attached. The Park Board held a public meeting on March 25, 2004, and a summary of that meeting is also attached. Due to the previous public participation during the grant application process, the public comment period will extend for fifteen (15) days following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., April 6, 2005, and can be mailed to the address below:

Heron Boat Ramp Comments
Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or e-mail comments to: mawatkins@mt.gov

- 3. Duration of comment period, if any:**

Fifteen days, from March 22 through April 6, 2005.

- 4. Name, title, address, and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Marty Watkins, Regional Parks Manager
Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-4573
mawatkins@mt.gov

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST
HERON BOAT RAMP
MOTORBOAT PROJECT

Date: February 25, 2005

Person Reviewing: Marty Watkins
Parks Program Manager

Project Location:

The Heron boat ramp is located on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir of the lower Clark Fork River in Sanders County, Montana. Primarily used by local boaters, the reservoir provides close-to-home recreation opportunities for the residents of the lower Clark Fork River Valley, including the rural towns of Heron and Noxon, Montana.

Description of Proposed Work:

The goal of the project is to improve the facilities at the Heron boat ramp so that the site can be enjoyed and easily accessed by the public for boat launching, day-use recreation, and fishing on the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir. To accomplish this goal, we propose to implement the following improvements:

- Replace the current ramp with a new one-lane concrete-log boat ramp.
- Provide a 6'-by-20' dock with synthetic, low-maintenance decking.
- Provide a gravel parking area adjacent to the boat ramp to accommodate up to 15 vehicles with boat trailers.
- Provide universal access between the parking area and boat launch.
- Provide a picnicking area, including universally accessible tables; provide a universally accessible hardened-surface pathway to the picnicking area.
- Provide a shoreline fishing area and a universally accessible trail that leads to the area.
- Install a rustic perimeter fence (split rail).
- Install directional signage on the main road leading to the site.
- Install educational signage at the boat launch.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check ✓ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- [] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: *Roadway will be built over existing road; area where parking lot will be located is bare dirt and has been disturbed in the past.*
- [] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: *None*
- [] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?

Comments: *Limited leveling needed; will be less than 20 c.y.*

- ☐ D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: *Parking lot will be built on previously disturbed land.*
- ☐ E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: *Proposed ramp is single-width, and roll-in dock is handicapped-accessible.*
- ☐ F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: *None, other than handicapped-accessible roll-in dock.*
- ☐ G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry-quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: *None.*
- ☐ H. Any new above-ground utility lines?
Comments: *None*
- ☐ I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: *Day-use area; there will be no camping.*
- ☐ J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern, including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: *This project will improve an existing ramp and parking, and add handicapped-accessible fishing dock, so existing features or use patterns will not change significantly.*

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the checklist above. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance; see Regional State Parks office.

Heron Boat Ramp Open House Meeting
March 25, 2004
Heron Community Center
6:30 –7:30

Meeting Summary

Board Chair Brian Burky and Board member Ty Damaskos represented the Sanders County Park Board.

10 individuals attended the meeting, eight of which signed in. 3 members of the public were in favor of the Heron Boat Ramp improvement and offered the following comments

“...the site needs to be improved and signed.”

“Good ideas, go for it.”

“...the site needs to be signed so people will feel comfortable launching a boat there.”

The remaining members of the public live in the subdivision surrounding the Heron Boat Ramp. They were generally not in favor of the proposed improvement and provided the following comments.

“The site is usable in its current condition and needs no improvement.”

“This site should not be advertised and people should not be encourage to go there.”

“There is no reason to improve the site.”

“The ramp is fine and people use it as it is.”

Following the public meeting the Sanders County Park Board was contacted by seven Heron area residents (from the general area, however not from the subdivision) that are in favor of the project. These individuals have provided a letter of support with signatures from local residents.

In addition, the Park Board's county-wide Recreation Survey (February, 2002) indicated a strong desire for fishing access, finding 80% of county residents regularly go fishing (Page 11 of survey). The survey also found that expansion of fishing related opportunities was of primary importance to county residents (Page 14).

March 10, 2004

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
P. O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Attn: Local Government Boating Improvement Grant Program

Dear Program Staff,

Avista Corp. (Avista) is supportive of efforts to make improvements to the Heron Boat Ramp. Avista has a history of working with volunteer organizations and the county government to keep this recreation area accessible. Avista is dedicated to the ongoing success of the Heron Boat Ramp and will continue to work with these groups. In addition, Avista pledges \$18,000 towards the boat ramp improvement project and will help with design, planning, and construction and / or provide equipment when possible.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued Avista a new license effective March 2001 for the continued operation of the Clark Fork Hydro Electric Project. The license was issued for 45 years. As part of the new license, Avista developed the Recreation Resource Management Plan (December 1998, updated December 2003), which includes maintaining the Heron Boat Ramp as a public site.

Sincerely

Tim Swant
Clark fork License Manager

March 23, 2004

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
P. O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Attn: Local Government Boating Improvement Grant Program

Dear Program Staff,

Avista Corp. monitors company property for the presence of noxious weeds. As needed, Avista will develop a plan to treat areas of noxious weeds as outlined in section 2.2 of the enclosed Pesticide and Herbicide Plan.

The Heron Boat Ramp currently has a low concentration of knapweed throughout the site. Avista will work with the county weed agent to include this site as part of Avistas' annual noxious weed spraying program. The areas impacted by knapweed will be treated to favor native vegetation. This area as it is taken care of by volunteers, Avista employees and County employees. The care takers make regular visits to the site and will be able to monitor the site for future infestations of weeds.

Sincerely

Brian K. Burky
Recreation / Land Use Specialist

-----Original Message-----

From: Dave Lyman [mailto:lastlyman@blackfoot.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2004 10:57 AM
To: Brian Burky
Subject: Boat Ramp Park

Hi Brian,

There are quite a few people in Heron who wish to see improvements done to the park on Golden Pond Road. Few folks knew about your meeting last Thursday, but now want to give you some input and I hope it is not too late. We have used the old ramp in years past to put in our canoe, and we like having the convenience of a place on this side of the river in Heron to do it. We haven't used it in a while and I imagine it is pretty funky now. I would like to be able to use it in the future and would look forward to an upgrade. Having a delineated area around the park would be a vast improvement since there are houses now and I wouldn't want to accidentally park in their space.

Several more people will be writing to you soon and we hope to have a petition to send you. Please don't shut down the possibility of improving the park because of your last meeting. Please give us a little more time. Thank You!

Debbie and Dave Lyman
34 Beaver Peak Rd.
Heron, MT 59844
8472388

-----Original Message-----

From: Geri Lee [mailto:nox2415@blackfoot.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2004 5:56 PM
To: brian.burky@avistacorp.com
Subject: Golden Pond Access Area

Brian,

I support the development of the boat access area on Golden Pond Road in Heron. This is the only access the people have on this side of the Clark Fork River.

Please review.

Dillion and Geri Lee

-----Original Message-----

From: Lou Springer [mailto:nox5594@blackfoot.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2004 9:32 AM
To: Burky, Brian
Subject: Heron Dock

Dear Brian,

We were unaware that a public meeting to discuss the placement of a dock and boat ramp on the newly re-acquired Heron recreational site was held. We both strongly support placing a public boat ramp and dock on this site, and would have said so if we had known about a public meeting.

Please advise us of any future public meetings regarding recreation sites along the Cabinet Gorge and Noxon reservoir.

Thank you,
Bob and Lou Springer

Questions? call Debbie 8472388

Judy 8472717

HERON PARK AT GOLDEN POND

We, the undersigned residents of the Heron community, support the development of the county Park on the Cabinet Reservoir off of Golden Pond Road. We understand that the development would initially consist of the following:

- a gravel loop road and parking
- improved boat ramp
- dock
- picnic tables
- split rail fence surrounding the park
- weed control plan
- public access signage
- other necessary improvements for public safety and enjoyment for a "primitive" park

RECEIVED
APR 06 2004
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

NAME	ADDRESS
1. Debbie Lyman	34 Beaver Peak Rd Heron
2. Melissa Dunn	153 Elk Creek Rd Heron
3. Glen Lee	P.O. Box 49 Heron
4. Jo McLaughlin	P.O. Box 75 Heron
5. Rob Hahn	P.O. Box 36 Heron
6. Jeremiah Archer	P.O. Box 352 Heron
7. Elvira L. Compton	126 Hwy 200 Heron,
8. Kathleen R Ball	26 Hwy 200, Heron
9. Nancy J Ball	28 Hwy 200, Heron
10. Carol Klatzke	61 Heron Rd
11. Mary C. Williams	77 Blue Creek Rd. Heron
12. Laine Dwyer	P.O. Box 16 Heron
13. Susan Cowden	126 Hwy 200 Heron

Questions? Call Debbie 8472388

Judy 8472717

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- weed control plan
- public access signage
- other necessary improvements for public safety and enjoyment for a "primitive" park

RECEIVED

APR 06 2004

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

NAME	ADDRESS	
14. Velma Jean Jensen	PO BOX 144	Heron, MT 59844
15. Julia Pearson	PO Box 250	HERON MT 59844
16. Barbara Ross	Bull River,	
17. Mary Edith Huelke	P.O. Box 30	Heron, mt 59844
18. Sara Lou Springer	440 Elk CK	Heron, MT 59844
19. Bob Cheshire	Bull River	
20. Mike Miller	548 Elk Rd Heron MT	
21. Dave Keester	208 Clark Fork Rd Heron	59844
22. Dave Haggerty	500 Elk Cr Rd Heron	59844
23. Susie Premier	485 Elk creek rd Heron	59844
24. Dave Lyman	31 Beaver Peak Rd Heron	59844

Questions: call Debbie 8472388

Judy 8472717

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- public access signage
- other necessary improvements for public safety and enjoyment for a "primitive" park

RECEIVED

APR 06 2004

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

NAME	ADDRESS
25. Lian S. Hooper	PO Box 342 Heron MT 59844
26. Mr. Long Jr.	Box 112 Heron MT 59844
27. Dillon Lee	Heron MT 847-2333
28. Mick Huntley	201 Elk Ck Heron MT 847-2396
29. Kathleen Hunter	" " " "
30. Tobo Leiveslad	Trout Creek
31. Judy Harris	P.O. Box 104 HERON MONTANA
32. Bob Springer	440 Elk Ck Heron
33. Chris Compton	127 Hwy 200 Heron 59844
34.	
35.	
71	